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12 November 2014

Jenny Whitney
Acting Headteacher
St Christopher's
St Christopher's Hall
Renfrew Road
Ipswich
IP4 3HG

Dear Mrs Whitney

No formal designation monitoring inspection of St Christopher's

Following my visit to your unit on 10 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the unit.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements at the Montgomery Road site. I met with you, the lead teacher and a representative of the local authority.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The unit's safeguarding arrangements do not meet requirements.

Further improvements are required to safeguarding procedures at the Montgomery Road site. Some of the concerns raised during the previous monitoring inspection in October 2013 have not been resolved. This monitoring inspection raised further concerns about maintaining attendance registers and following up disclosures made by pupils about their safety and well-being. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors will re-visit the unit again in the near future to check that all pupils are kept safe.

Context

St Christopher's is a pupil referral unit for 12 pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3 who are already, or are at risk of being permanently excluded from school. All of them have special educational needs relating to their behavioural and emotional well-being. All are dual registered with mainstream schools. At its last inspection in June 2013 it was judged to be good. The unit's substantive headteacher is currently seconded to another pupil referral unit in the area. St Christopher's is led and managed by an acting headteacher. In partnership with other providers in the local area, it aims to convert to an academy in September 2015.

In September 2013, the headteacher of St Christopher's agreed to the request from the local authority to merge non-registered provision at Montgomery Road into the pupil referral unit. This merger has been registered with the Department for Education. Nine Key Stage 4 pupils currently attend the Montgomery Road site. All of them have complex special educational needs.

A monitoring inspection carried out at no notice in October 2013 found that the building at the Montgomery Road site was not fit for purpose. Significant improvements were needed to its sanitation, decoration and internal security. Concerns were also raised about pupils' poor behaviour, the curriculum, attendance and the quality of leadership and management. This second monitoring inspection focused entirely on the Montgomery Road site and the actions taken by leaders and managers, and the local authority to improve it.

Improvements have been made to the building, which is now fit for purpose. Separate toilets for boys and girls are provided. Classrooms have been redecorated and internal locks fitted to the doors. New furniture and information technology equipment has been installed. Wall displays, including examples of pupils' work, help to promote respect for the learning environment. Doors at the main entrance, emergency exits and to the first floor which is used for a different educational purpose, are all secure.

The curriculum has been strengthened through arrangements to borrow specialist resources for teaching science. Pupils are taken off-site each week to participate in physical education. Staffing levels have been increased so there are always at least two members of staff on site every day. However, not all pupils receive their full entitlement to learning. Daily provision is minimal and equates to only 22 hours of tuition each week. A combination of late starts to the day, travelling to off-site providers and reduced timetables leads to some pupils receiving a minimal amount of tuition and support. The regular absence and exclusion of some pupils only exacerbates this problem.

Too many pupils were excluded from the unit in 2014. This pattern shows no signs of reducing so far this year. Attendance remains low. There are no clear strategies in place to reduce exclusions or raise attendance. A recent scrutiny of attendance monitoring has revealed that registers are not being maintained accurately and procedures are not being followed correctly. Therefore, the lead teacher is unaware of where all pupils are and is unable to ensure their safety and well-being. Some pupils are recorded as present when they are not; others are recorded as absent but are present in the unit. Currently, the attendance register is inaccurate and untidy.

The single central record, managed centrally and stored at St Christopher's is kept up to date and is secure. Procedures to follow up concerns about safety raised by pupils at the Montgomery Road site are ineffective. A scrutiny of documents revealed that serious issues disclosed by pupils to staff are not rigorously investigated. Detailed records are not kept of the actions taken to protect pupils.

Individual pupils' attendance is not scrutinised and procedures to log incidents of poor behaviour are unavailable. The impact of the recent improvements made to the learning environment is unclear because accurate records of pupils' attainment and progress are not maintained. Some monitoring of teaching has taken place but this does not summarise what staff do well and what they need to do to improve.

The acting headteacher has taken action to manage the performance of the lead teacher. Weekly meetings are held to monitor her leadership and management. Further concerns are currently being investigated by the governing body. Currently, governors are not checking that there is sufficient capacity to secure improvements on the Montgomery Road site.

External support

The acting headteacher feels that the local authority has been much more supportive this year. Refurbishments have taken place and additional advisory support for staff has been provided. The local authority's recent review identified the need for improvements to the unit's leadership and management, in particular recording attendance, timetabling and safeguarding.

Priorities for further improvement

- Take immediate action to strengthen the leadership and management of the Montgomery Road site, so that pupils are kept safe and significant improvements are made to the quality of education they receive.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk, to the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Governing Body This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector